

Edmonton

March 1996

NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, February 19, '96

7:30pm

10112 - 124 St

Lower Level

Parking is available behind
Boystown Cafe

We look forward to meeting with
with parents, families and friends
of lesbian, gay, bisexual and
transgendered young adults. The
young people are most welcome
too!

Questions? Comments? Please
phone Lynne [redacted] Cindy
[redacted] or [redacted] VB3524.

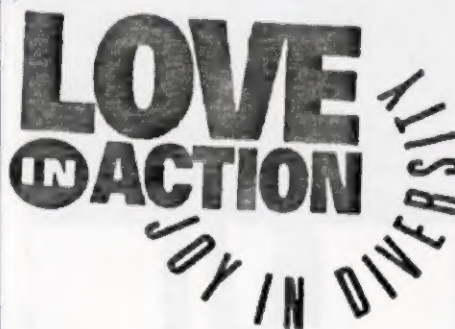
Coffee will be served. Everyone
welcome!

SPECIAL MEETING:

Monday, April 1, 1996

7:30pm

Louise Grisdale, representing the
Superintendent of Edmonton
Public Schools, will be speaking
on "What can teachers,
counsellors, administrators and
parents do to counteract the
suicidal effects of the



*homophobic environment in
Edmonton Public Schools?"*

All lesbian, gay, bisexual and
transgendered persons who have
at one time or another attended
an Edmonton Public school are
urged to attend. Bring your
parent(s) if at all possible!

There will be a half-hour
presentation by Louise after
which she will take questions,
suggestions and comments from
those present. Come and listen
and/or speak as you prefer. The
young people in the schools need
your concern and/or ideas.

Coffee and "goodies" will be
served. Everyone welcome!

PFLAG EDUCATION

In light of the upcoming April 1/96
meeting it is fair to ask "Is there
discrimination on the basis of
sexual orientation in Edmonton
Public Schools?"

To wit - the following excerpts from
the front page of *The Edmonton
Journal*, Saturday, March 2, 1996,
entitled, "What makes Chad
jump?"

- "It's not easy being a 14-year-
old boy at the best of times.
And when...you're regularly
beset by a bunch of sniggering
classmates who run in packs
and seem pre-occupied with
attacking your masculinity
...well sometimes you wonder if
it was a real smart thing to
have become a figure skater.
- In grade 6 Chad used to beat up
his tormentors, but when he
entered junior high they
became bigger and started
travelling in packs, so he's
given up...It had got so that he
had few friends at school..."

(Editor's note: In Chad's case he
may well go on to fame and fortune
as his hero, Kurt Browning, did.

Unfortunately too many les/bi/gay youth go on to become 30% of the teens who commit suicide here in Alberta. **How can we as parents and educators prevent this?**

PFLAG VOLUNTEERISM

From PFLAG Houston come a wonderful story of initiative and volunteerism:

Straight from the heart

by Mary Kay Jones

"How can we promote love and tolerance for our gay children? Let me share what I have been doing.

When I saw Dee Mosbacher's powerful video, "Straight from the Heart", I knew I had to order this video and try to get this information into our Sunday School Classes at my church. After I received the video, I showed it to my friends individually, then to small groups of friends, always trying to get someone to present it as a Sunday School Lesson.

Finally, I decided that if it was to be done, I would have to do it myself. Praying for courage, I took the video to the staff member in charge of approving teachers and the material that would be presented to the adult Sunday School classes. I told him that there was so much misinformation about the Gay Community that I wanted to share with my friends and acquaintances at the church that our son was gay and to tell them how much we loved and cared for him. Also, to let them know how proud we are of our children, both gay and straight.

After he previewed the video, he approved it, and I was on the list. I felt excited and nervous! Keep in mind that this was the first time I had ever taught adult classes, even though I have a background of

teaching children and teens. I belong to Memorial Drive Methodist Church which has a large membership with 20 adult classes. Now the next step would be to get invited to some of these classes.

The new list of teachers and their subjects went out last January ('95), and it was April before I was asked to teach. However I have now been invited to eight different classes and I have had some really good feed-back. One woman told the class after the video that she had five close friends that had gay children, and she asked for extra hand-out (material from "Healing the Hurt" conferences that I had copied) to send to her friends. Also, she called me later to find out how her friends could order the video.

Each time I presented my lesson, there were always some members in the class that acknowledged their support for what I was doing and told me that the church needed to hear and act out this message of love and tolerance for all people. This video does the work for you, so all you have to do is find someone to watch it. By the way, I just found out that I will be on the new teachers list coming out in 1996.

PFLAG EDUCATION

On Feb 29 and Mar 1, '96 PFLAG Edmonton hosted a display table at the Greater Edmonton Teachers' annual conference. The theme of this booth was *teen homosexual suicide* with literature available covering such topics as *What is homosexuality? Why do lesbian and gay teens take their lives? How can counsellors, teachers and administrators help? Resources available for suicidal teens* (including the relatively new

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Mobile Mental Health Crisis Intervention Service which is a 24-hour emergency service for persons experiencing a psychiatric or emotional crisis (482-HELP).

A number of school C.A.L.M. teachers and councillors took our speakers' bureau number and also PFLAG lesbian & gay posters to put up at their schools. There were requests for literature with which the following students could identify:

- children of lesbian and gay parents; and
- les/bi/gay students

Anyone knowing of appropriate titles and their publishers please send them to Ellen Howrish,

Edmonton, AB,

THANKYOU!

Many thanks to Graham and all those who made this display table a success.

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Joining the Tribe by Linnea Due

Linnea Due is a writer and managing editor of the Express, an alternative weekly in Berkeley, California. In the introduction of *Joining the Tribe* she gives us a detailed account of what it was like to grow up lesbian in the '60s. The remainder of the book contains interviews with gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender youth on what it is like to grow up gay in the '90s. Robb Forman Dew author of *The Family Heart* writes, "This book should be compulsory reading for anyone who cares about moral decency, real 'family values', social justice and especially the welfare of children, any children, all children." I could not agree with her more!

It's a Gay Life!

March 1996

Putting a Face on Homosexuality

or

*"Why don't Christians treat
homosexuals like human
beings?"*

by Letha Dawson Scanzoni

Christians react in various ways to the matter of sexual orientation. Some are familiar with the behavioral science research - and relatively accepting of its findings. So they're convinced that in speaking of homosexual orientation, we're dealing with a way of *being and feeling*. And they realize those feelings remain, whether or not they're ever translated into acts.

But the attitudes of other Christians toward homosexuality are often governed by myths and stereotypes. Too often our false labels and distorted characterizations are due to serious misconceptions about the nature of homosexual orientation. **We have believed popular fantasies rather than looking at the facts and struggling with truths more challenging than we'd like.**

"There's a tendency among Christians to lump all homosexuals

together as a group of faceless, nameless 'perverts' - and to make



statements not rooted in fact. They don't see us as people," an Indiana University graduate student told me several years ago.

It's in this matter of seeing gays as people - respecting their personhood despite our differences in sexual orientation - where so many of us fail as Christians. One lesbian told me, "It kills me that people sit around talking stereotypically about gays and don't know they're sitting next to one in church."

Similarly, another woman told of a time when a professional colleague pointed out a stranger on the street

and said, "That man is a homosexual. I can spot one any time, just by looking at them." She recalled thinking, "Oh, if you could only know! You've worked with me for nearly a quarter of a century - and have never guessed my orientation. And because of your anxiety and hostility over this topic, I'll never be able to share this part of myself with you, even though you think of me as your friend."

In another case a pastor boasted of his ability to detect homosexual persons because "the Holy Spirit bore witness" in his heart whenever a gay person happened on the scene. Yet he hadn't the foggiest notion that his highly-esteemed assistant pastor, living celibately, had struggled for years to come to terms with his own homosexual orientation!

Many Christians are hostile to such people. Some refuse to accept evidence that the homosexual orientation is involuntary and are persuaded that the orientation itself is sinful - even apart from any sexual activity. One writer, Dave Engelsma, goes so far as to say that "the sin of homosexuality is not one shameful sin among many; rather it is the sin that most fully works out and manifests sin's vileness - it is the nadir of the degradation of sin." To Engelsma, nothing is so "monstrous", "unnatural", or "perverse" as

homosexuality. "The homosexual mind - the disposition, the tendency - is reprobate", Engelsma declares.¹

Not everyone who condemns the mere presence of homosexual feelings does so in as extreme a fashion as Engelsma. Yet for many Americans, few issues bring forth such harsh reactions, such gut-level revulsion, as does homosexuality. Where does this revulsion come from?

We have, of course, been guilty of the same distorted vision and depersonalization in our views and treatment of other minority groups throughout history. I'm reminded of a statement attributed to Alexander Hamilton in another context: "The contempt we have been taught to entertain for blacks makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor in experience."² We could easily substitute the word gays for blacks - and find the statement equally indicting.

On the surface some of this reaction might appear to be linked to concern over maintaining a certain interpretation and use of Scripture. But look how the Bible is often used. Toward what other group are snatches of Scripture (including mistranslations) hurled so brutally and with such self-righteous contempt?

We all need to examine Scripture in an open and careful way, responding in obedience and faith to its teachings. But something more than an honest concern for Scripture seems to be involved when the Bible is used as a weapon for cruelly wounding sensitive people, driving many away from the God who reaches out to them in love.



In his excellent book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, Yale historian John Boswell deals with this. He shows how public sentiment toward a particular group at a particular time is reflected in the religious teachings emphasized and used as support at that time. Boswell's book contains a detailed chapter on Scripture passages relating in some way to homosexuality, and he suggests that "careful analysis can almost always differentiate between conscientious application of religious ethics and the use of religious precepts as justification for personal animosity or prejudice."³

Boswell then traces the how and why of social intolerance toward various minorities over the course of history. In showing how **the preferences of the majority of people tend to be equated with the preferences of God**, Boswell refers to the "tendency of humans to dislike or mistrust what is different or unusual." Such a tendency, he suggests, "adds a certain visceral force to this belief in the rightness of majority sentiment."⁴

I think this is the key to the revulsion many people express when the topic of homosexuality is

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discussed. We are dealing here with an *anomaly* - something which doesn't fit the usual categories or customary order of things. (The term is not intended perjoratively.) If the general rule is that women are attracted to men and men to women, how does one deal with the exception to that rule - the notion that some persons seem somehow "programmed" to be attracted to their own sex?

Cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas speaks of the taboos and anxieties that spring up in societies when they are faced with anomalies. The anomalies can be ignored or condemned or *deliberately confronted and seen in a new way* so that they can have a place in the scheme of things.⁵

Until recently most of us in Christian circles were used to the first two approaches to homosexuality. The topic was simply ignored and homosexual persons were invisible. If the topic was discussed at all, the tone was one of condemnation. Douglas explains why individuals and societies so often choose these ways of dealing with anomalies: "uncomfortable facts which refuse to be fitted in, we find ourselves ignoring or distorting so that they do not disturb (our) established assumptions."⁶

Sometimes the easiest thing to do is to get rid of an anomaly, "Take night-crowing cocks," says Douglas. "if their necks are promptly wrung, they do not live to contradict the definition of a cock as a bird that crows at dawn."⁷ **She also tells of societies which have put twins to death because the phenomenon of multiple births contradicts the usual order in which human beings have single births and animals have litters.** Condemning an anomaly is

a way of strengthening our view of reality. And if we attribute danger to the anomaly (a common way groups deal the "different"), we can put the subject above dispute. For example if we say "Rome fell because of homosexuality" and warn that America is in the same danger, who is going to argue that homosexuals are unjustly harassed?

We do not have to look far back in history to see where the perception of some group as "different" or "dangerous" can lead. The holocaust stands as a dreadful reminder. It is no surprise that homosexual persons were forced to wear pink triangles as the Jews were required to wear the Star of David and they were herded into the concentration camps and gas chambers right alongside the Jews.

Of course few voices today are likely to say - at least very loudly - that homosexual persons should be wiped out. But some of the ugly rhetoric suggests such a sentiment.

Thus some people in scientific circles fear that even research designed to understand and possibly prevent homosexual orientation could be used against people already homosexual, labeling them as 'bad' or 'undesirable'. In 1982 for instance the German Society for Sex Research condemned research which used hormone treatments during fetal development to try to eradicate homosexuality. The society not only faulted the soundness of the experiments and alleged findings but suggested that the research itself was in collusion with social prejudice against homosexuals.

I think what may be troubling to many Christians today is that we are being asked to follow Mary Douglas's third way of dealing with anomalies. We are being



asked to confront the fact of homosexual orientation and seek creative ways to deal with it. **We can no longer pretend homosexuality doesn't exist or doesn't concern us as Christians.** We are meeting homosexual Christians in our churches, on our campuses, in our other social contracts. We are hearing from them a denominational gathering; we are facing questions of ordination, of church membership and fellowship and of ethical life-style.

Meeting homosexual Christians - or discovering that a highly admired Christian friend or relative considers himself or herself to be homosexually oriented - can be disturbing if we have been taught to think of homosexual persons as groups of sleazy, evil, anti-God people.

I sometimes compare the dissonance felt at such times to the feelings of a group of school children when a devoted teacher wanted to change their prejudiced attitudes toward blacks. The children's parents prided themselves on racism, and many belonged to the Ku Klux Klan. The teacher instituted a reading hour in which she read aloud daily a story of a little girl named Jenny. The

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teacher refused to show the children the pictures of Jenny, saying she would wait until the last day to show them what Jenny looked like.

On the day the story ended, the children crowded around to see Jenny's picture. They were shocked to find she was black! They had thought of her as a friend, someone just like them. How could she be black? Their parents had taught them bad things about black people. Now one of life's certainties had been destroyed, and they could never feel quite the same about black people. The same thing can happen when we meet gay people.

If we as Christians are going to minister to gay people in Christ's name, we first must stop viewing homosexual orientation and homosexual persons in the abstract. We must allow the subject to become *personalized* to us.

Sometimes it comes to us that way unbidden. A few years ago, *Response*, the magazine of United Methodist Women, took a survey of crisis experiences in Methodist women's lives. One percent of the respondents reported they were homosexual, and another 14 percent told of becoming aware of the homosexuality of a close friend or family member. Many felt the church had provided no help at such times. Or, because they felt people in the church would be unable to handle the information, they refrained from telling anyone. As a result, **they experienced only loneliness, when they longed for understanding and support.** One woman, whose daughter had revealed that she is homosexual, wrote: "We have grown spiritually (through this experience). We have had to bread down our 'walls of prejudice'. Homosexuals - lesbians

- now have a face: our daughter's."⁹

As we stop keeping homosexuality at a distance, as an abstract, and as we see it up close, with a face, something happens to us. We begin to see we are dealing with real human beings made in God's image. And we begin to feel the pain of bearing a stigma and experiencing the oppression and fear as though it were happening to us.

I remember reading not too long ago an account of the life of John Howard Griffin, a white writer who wanted to combat racism. He was told by blacks, "The only way you can know what it's like is to wake up in my skin." Griffin did just that by having his skin artificially darkened and then writing *Black Like Me*, which tells how he was treated when others thought he was a black man. The author of the article, Robert Ellsberg, calls what Griffin did "a radical effort at human empathy".

How can we make a "radical effort at empathy" toward those persons whose sexual orientation is gay? For one thing, we need to listen - really listen - to our gay brothers and sisters in Christ. I remember hearing one deeply spiritual Christian tell of what it was like to sit in a church and flinch with pain as the pastor pounded the pulpit with point after point he claimed to base on Romans 1. He was saying that all homosexuals had reprobate minds; all homosexuals hated God; all homosexuals were rejecters of Christ, demon-possessed, and going to hell. The woman kept thinking "That's not true. What I've experienced of God and what he's saying just don't fit together. And what he's saying the text says isn't even there!"



Later she prayed at home through an entire night, acknowledging to God her homosexuality and saying, "God, all my life I've heard homosexuals are your enemies - that they hate you. But I don't hate you, God, I love you. If what they say is true, then I'm going to hell. But, God, even if you send me to hell, I'll *still* love you. I'll never stop loving you!" She began a journey toward self-acceptance as the sun rose that morning. As was the case with several other gay persons who have told me their stories, she found the loving understanding and support of empathic heterosexual Christians especially healing.

One man told me of his excruciating pain over deciding to leave the pastoral ministry because after two decades of service he could no longer deny his homosexual feelings. "The church failed me when I most needed it to speak to me," he said. He was able to rid himself of his intense anger and bitterness toward the church only after he found some Christians who were informed about the nature of homosexual orientation and were not afraid of it. They were willing to **listen** to him and stand with him in his struggles, helping him believe he may find a ministry once again.

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Our radical effort at empathy may include not only active listening but also creative efforts in using our imagination. Heterosexuals, for example, can think what it would be like to be told that their most loving, natural feelings toward the opposite sex were evil. If you are a heterosexual, try to imagine how you would feel if you were told God could never be present in the relationship between you and someone of the opposite sex - or that the best way to please God was for you never to have romantic feelings for those of the other sex. If you wanted to marry the person you loved, imagine being told that the church would do everything possible to break up your relationship "for your own good."

And then imagine how you would feel if, on top of all that, the church said you - as a heterosexual - needed to develop romantic feelings toward people of your own sex and even encouraged you in a homosexual marriage. Homosexual persons tell us that's what their experience often feels like.

Imaginary exercises such as this are similar to a special workshop that was set up recently by a hospital to help teachers learn what children with certain perceptual handicaps are feeling.⁹ For example to provide some insight into the reading problems of children with dyslexia, a teacher was told to take a pencil and draw through a maze while looking at a reverse image in a mirror. And to make this frustrating experience even worse, she was constantly told to hurry up - to conform, to be like everybody else, to experience life as others do. And although all of this made her feel inept and foolish, it gave her new insight into her students' experience.¹⁰

5 Someone told me that for years he had had a friend with a homosexual orientation. Before becoming a Christian, the heterosexual man had always accepted the friend fully. But when the homosexual friend learned of the heterosexual's conversion to Christ, one of his first questions was, "Can you still love me - now that you're a Christian?" And the man wasn't able to answer affirmatively for many months.

Many gay persons are asking us the same question. They have had their sense of worth and dignity assaulted in the name of Christ. Many who are already followers of Christ have had their salvation doubted. I wish we could say to them, "Yes, I do love you - not in spite of being a Christian by because I am a Christian. The homosexual is my neighbor and I will love my neighbor as myself!"

"But isn't this being 'soft on homosexuality'?" some will object. "And aren't you condoning an 'anything goes' attitude that runs contrary to Scripture?" No; both heterosexual and homosexual Christians are responsible before God to uphold the same ethical standards and to live lives of faithfulness to Christ in love and "justice rooted in discipleship." There is no double standard.

"But what if you're all wrong?" the protest continues. "What will you say before the judgment seat of Christ?" My thoughts turn to the words of a compassionate, caring evangelical pastor who was criticized for permitting two homosexual men to sing in the church choir. They wanted to use their God-given singing talents for the glory of God and out of love for their Savior. "I know this is a very controversial area the pastor told me, 'but when I get to heaven, I



would rather find that - if I've erred - I've erred in the direction of being too merciful and compassionate rather than finding I was too judgmental and not compassionate enough."

To that I say, "Amen!"

1. From David Engelsma's three-part series in the September 15, 1981; November 1, 1981 and April 1982 issues of *The Standard Bearer*.

2. Quoted in Herbert Gutman. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*.

3. *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, p.7.

4. *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, p.38.

5. *Purity and Danger*, ch. 2

6. *Purity and Danger*, p. 49.

7. *Purity and Danger*, p. 52.

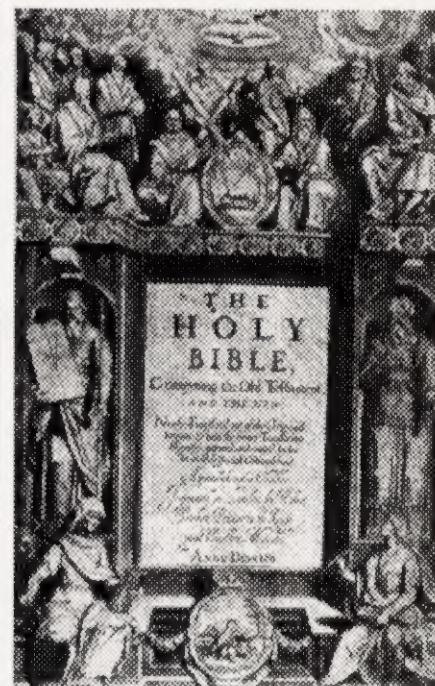
8. Quoted in *Response* (January 1982), p 23.

9. Reported in *Psychology Today* (January 1983).

10. I almost hesitate to use this illustration since it could be used to

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imply that a homosexual orientation is a disorder or handicap or sickness. That certainly isn't intended. What is intended is to show a parallel effort at developing empathy through somehow entering the other person's experience.



Title page 1611, King James Bible

(Editor's Note: This version of the Bible was made possible only through the support of King James who was himself, openly and publicly, a gay man.)

EVENTS CALENDAR

Suzanne Westenhoefer

March 17, 1996

7:00pm, door; 8:00pm, performance

Princess Theatre - Great Comedy!

Tickets \$15 at Orlando Books & Alternative Video Spot.

Gay & Lesbian Awareness Week

Mar 19: Pink Triangle Supplement

Mar 21 - Blue Jean Day

Mar 22 - Variety Show

Mar 22 & 23 - Queer Academy

Mar 23 - Queer at the Top III at RATT

Queer: Act: Queer

March 21, 22 & 23

Humanities Centre

111 St. and Sask Drive

U of A Campus

A conference on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender studies)

OUTreach: [REDACTED]

Registration forms available from:

The Alberta Piano Chamber Society

April 14, 1996

2:30pm

Wedgwood Room -Hotel Macdonald

Enjoy a Sunday afternoon of delightful classical music.

Info: 430-9783

Internet:

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~krobbic/>

Alberta Summit '96

April 26 - 28, '96

Arts Building, Red Deer College

Red Deer, Alberta

Sven Robinson will be guest speaker on Friday night.

Contact:

-Lee or Shannon at [REDACTED]

-Corey at [REDACTED]

Summit Fee: \$25

The Great Human Race

8 km run & 3 km fun walk

10:00am

Sunday, April 28, '96

Participate in a morning of fun, fitness, entertainment and prizes! Join the excitement and at the same time raise funds for your favourite non-profit agency and celebrate Volunteer Week.

Entry Fee:

\$20/person individual fee

\$10/person for non-profit agency teams

LATE FLASH -- DELWIN VRIEND FIGHTS ON!



It's a Gay Life!

The following excerpt from Edmonton Journal writer Linda Goyette's article, *Polite words obscure age-old bias against gays*, (Tuesday, Feb. 27/96) poignantly express the feelings of the gay-positive world:

Delwin Vriend, be patient. You have not lost your fight. You have only encountered the stubborn rigidity of Alberta's Court of Appeal at the halfway point in a difficult journey.

Keep walking. You're almost there.

The Court of Appeal has decided to be blind, deaf and silent to the discrimination that plagues the lives of homosexuals in this province. It has ruled that Alberta's Individual's Rights Protection Act already covers all people, that it is "neutral, non-aligned and inclines to neither the homosexual nor the heterosexual community."

This is an obtuse conclusion. Wrong and wrong and wrong. The legislation ignores discrimination against gays, deliberately, because the Conservative government sees nothing offensive about the offence.....

One courtroom defeat does not mean failure. Justice John McClung had a grandmother named Nellie who found finer words for people like Delwin Vriend in her hardwon struggle for human rights: "Never retreat. Never explain. Never apologize. Get the thing done and let them howl!"

On to the Supreme Court of Canada, Mr. Vriend, and let 'em howl. Good luck.

PFLAG Edmonton eagerly anticipates the day you are vindicated Delwin.